

## **Graduation Trends in NCRA-Certified Programs**

1996 to 2006

As guardians of the record whenever spoken words must be made into text, the skills of court reporters are in growing demand. The ability to create word-for-word written accounts, long deemed essential in courtrooms and law offices, is now needed in settings as diverse as television studios, classrooms, business conferences, cathedrals and theaters. Work is plentiful in government agencies, professional firms or freelance positions, and annual earnings are on the rise. [1]

Surveys sponsored by the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) indicate an upward trend in the high-tech nature of the court reporting profession, especially in the legal and judicial field. A December 2006 study revealed that more than 4 of every 10 court reporters who are members of NCRA regularly provide access to litigation support technology, a service that requires the ability to accurately transcribe in realtime at a rate of at least 180 and often exceeding 220 words-per-minute.

“These highly trained professionals are uniquely able to capture and convert spoken words into information that can be read, searched and archived,” says Mark Golden, NCRA executive director and CEO. “This specialization has created new career paths, including broadcast captioning and realtime translation services for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing.”

While both the demand for court reporters and the need for training in this profession’s technological advances are on the rise, the ranks of court reporters and students of this profession continue to grow thin. [2]

Current estimates indicate that the total number of court reporters in the United States has dropped to approximately 35,000, down from 43,000 a decade earlier. The need to replenish and strengthen the ranks of the profession is great due to the increasing demand for the services of professionals with realtime reporting skill in support of judicial and legal activities, to meet broadcast captioning mandates [3], and to provide access to academic, cultural and business-related events by persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Equally disturbing is the continuing downward trend in the number of court reporters who are graduating from schools and colleges certified by the National Court Reporters Association.

The Council on Approved Student Education (CASE) of the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) establishes general requirements and minimum standards for the certification of education programs at the postsecondary or collegiate level to prepare realtime reporters. [4] These requirements and standards further the core mission of NCRA to promote excellence among those who capture and convert the spoken word to text and to support every member in achieving the highest level of professional expertise in judicial reporting, captioning, and communication access realtime translation (CART). [5]

The National Court Reporters Association conducts an annual survey of schools participating in the association’s approval/certification program. Data for the period 1996 through 2006 indicate losses in both the number of certified educational institutions and the number of students graduating from these programs. See tables one and two.

**Table One: NCRA-certified educational institutions 1996 – 2006**

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number Certified Schools	106	101	91	87	85	82	72	67	68	70	62
Percent Change	----	-4.7	-9.9	-4.3	-2.3	-3.5	-12.2	-6.9	+1.5	+2.9	-11.4

The near-steady decline over the 11-year period resulted in an overall 41.5 percent reduction in the number of NCRA-certified educational institutions with an average annual decline of 4.6 percent.

The decline in the numbers of graduating individuals generally tracked the same trend as the reduction in the number of NCRA-certified programs. However, percent changes were more pronounced for graduates. Over the 11-year period, for example, the overall decline was 61 percent, with an average annual reduction of 7.3 percent.

**Table Two: Graduates of NCRA-Certified Programs 1996 – 2006**

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Graduates	901	793	655	475	521	439	353	312	324	390	351
Percent Change	----	-12.0	-17.4	-27.4	+9.7	-15.7	-19.6	-11.6	+3.8	+20.3	-10.0

According to Reesa Parker, President of NCRA, this year 62 certified programs across the U.S. will graduate fewer than 350 court reporters; however, future demand trends are not expected to ease for highly skilled and technologically savvy court reporters. [6]

“Last year, due to the shortage of broadcast captioners, the deadline set by the Telecommunications Act was missed for closed-captioning of all new television programs in English,” Parker notes. “Millions of hard-of-hearing Americans were left without access to programming and critical emergency information.”

To help meet the need for court reporters, NCRA is reaching out to potential students at <http://www.bestfuture.com/>. In addition, bills before Congress call for competitive grants to train realtime writers and captioners.

“The training is challenging,” says Parker. “Court reporting courses take two to four years. They demand a great deal of practice and highly developed skills of dexterity and concentration. But for those who become guardians of the record, the rewards and sense of making a real contribution make it all worthwhile.”

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**The National Court Reporters Association**, a 24,000-member nonprofit organization, represents the judicial reporting and captioning professions. Members include official court reporters, deposition reporters, broadcast captioners, providers of realtime communication access services for deaf and hard-of-hearing people and others who capture and convert the spoken word into information bases and readable formats. For information, visit <http://www.ncraonline.org/>.

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1. The highest earning 10 percent made more than \$78,840 in 2004, according to U.S. Labor Department economist Tamara Dillon. See “From court reporting to Web casting: Captioning in the new millennium,” *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, summer 2006, pp 28-33.
  2. *The Status of Reporter Education: Trends and Analysis*, National Court Reporters Association, Vienna, Va., revised, summer 2003.
  3. The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 boosted demand for court reporters by mandating large increases in the numbers and types of television broadcasts that must be closed-captioned.
  4. The most recently revised CASE General Requirement and Minimum Standards for the NCRA become effective on August 1, 2007. See <http://www.ncraonline.org/> via the site’s “Education” tab.
  5. CART provides an immediate translation of all spoken words and environmental sounds in academic, civic, religious or cultural events for those who are deaf, have hearing impairments or are learning English as a second language.
  6. Community of interest surveys have found that 84.5 percent of respondents employed by government agencies – primarily courts at the federal, state or local level -- have achieved realtime writing skills, as have 94.7 percent of respondents who are freelance court reporters. Similarly, surveys of attorneys and legal staff overwhelmingly show agreement that court reporters are necessary, show support for integrating the realtime record into litigation support products, and show appreciation for realtime court reporting as an important skill.